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ABSTRACT

The unit of study offered in this paper is designed to guide the analysis of a representative sample of modern fiction from four English-speaking countries: the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia. Annotations of six novels are offered to show both how their main characters are young people coping with an intensely painful problem and how the novels are useful for study by ninth and tenth grade students. An outline presents ways in which the teacher might lead the whole class in studying a core novel--in this case, "The Pearl" by John Steinbeck--to prepare the class to read a book critically. Also offered are headings under which students can organize interpretive comments on "The Pearl," a list of topics for further exploration of the novel, suggestions for organizing and evaluating the study of several novels after studying "The Pearl" intensively, and a study guide for students discussing the novel in small groups. (RI)

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SIX NOVELS AS PARABLES: A LITERATURE UNIT FOR GRADES 9-10

John H. Stevens

As the title of this paper suggests, the six novels to be discussed are all short and all imply a strong, simple lesson concerning the nature of man. In each, the main characters are young people coping with an intensely painful problem. Together the novels provide a representative sample of modern fiction in English from four different countries: two are American, two Canadian, one British and one Australian.

The core novel to be read by everyone in the class is John Steinbeck's The Pearl. The other five, listed in order of increasing reading difficulty and psychological complexity, are as follows:

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Copper Sunrise, Bryan Buchan (Canadian)
Julie of the Wolves, Jean Craighead George (American)
Luke Baldwin's Vow, Morley Callaghan (Canadian)
Walkabout, James Marshall (Australian)
Lord of the Flies, William Golding (British)

The teacher will need a class set of the core novel, The Pearl, but only five or six copies of each of the other novels, which are to be studied in small groups. In case the teacher is unfamiliar with any of the novels, here are annotations for them.

THE NOVELS ANNOTATED

The Pearl, John Steinbeck, Penguin. (This edition also includes Steinbeck's The Red Pony.)

In his epigraph to The Pearl Steinbeck says, "If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it."

Kino, a poor Mexican fisherman, and his wife Juana discover a large and beautiful pearl during one of their pearl diving expeditions. At first the discovery seems like the fulfilment of a dream, but it leads to violence, bloodshed and exile from their village. Finally, on a mountain height to which they have fled from pursuers, Kino and Juana learn their bitterest lesson. They survive the experience but are profoundly changed by it.

Copper Sunrise, Bryan Buchan, Scholastic-Tab Publications.

The son of a Scottish family who have emigrated to Newfoundland forms a secret friendship with one of the few surviving Beothuk Indians. The young Beothuk and his parents have been driven by hunger from their inland hunting grounds to camp close to the fishing village where the white boy's family have settled.

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The stages in the boys' developing friendship are paralleled by the settlers' preparations to massacre the fugitive remnants of the Beothuk race. It is a poignant story told with poetic compression.

Julie of the Wolves, Jean Craighead George, Harper and Row.

Julie, a thirteen-year-old Eskimo girl, has escaped from an unhappy life in the home of her aunt by fulfilling a marriage contract made for her by her parents when she was a child. Her new home, and her dull-witted husband, also turn out to be more than she can bear, so she sets out across the Alaskan wilderness to find sanctuary in white civilization. Part of this long, dangerous journey is made in the company of a family of wolves. One significant incident in the novel is an attack on the wolves by aircraft riflemen. At the end of the novel the reader is left wondering: Do her experiences add up to victory for her, or a defeat?

Luke Baldwin's Vow, Morley Callaghan, Scholastic-Tab Publications.

After his father's fatal heart attack, Luke Baldwin is sent to Collingwood, Ontario, to live with his uncle who owns a sawmill there. This hard-headed businessman tries to act as moral teacher to his nephew, but the lessons that Luke learns are not those intended by his uncle. A dog, other young people and an impractical old failure named Mr. Kemp do the teaching.

Walkabout, James Marshall, Penguin.

Mary and her younger brother, Peter, are stranded in the Australian desert, the only survivors after their aircraft has crashed and burned. They are rescued from death by exposure when they encounter an aboriginal youth who is on his "walkabout" -- the half year of wandering alone in the desert which will mark his entry into tribal manhood, if he survives the test. Two weeks in his company teach them lessons that they will never forget. The result of the encounter for him, though, is destructive.

One of the sources of tension is the adolescent girl's awakening sexual awareness of the aboriginal boy, an element in the novel which is handled with skill and delicacy.

Lord of the Flies, William Golding, Faber and Faber.

Refugees from a global war set in some unspecified time in the future, Ralph, Jack and Piggy and a party of other school boys ranging in age from six to twelve years, crashland on a small coral island in the South Pacific. There are no adult survivors. In the months before they are rescued they undergo a sequence of violent and demoralizing experiences which seem to express the author's view of the nature of man. What at first promises to be a re-enactment of the Victorian adventures in Ballantyne's The Coral Island turns out to be something quite different.

The outline that follows indicates how the teacher might lead the whole class in studying the core novel, The Pearl, before each student reads one of the other five novels on his own and explores it as a member of a small study group.

Studying The Pearl Intensively

In order to demonstrate how an alert and imaginative reader can respond to the stimulus that a good novelist provides, the teacher will do well to launch the unit with a close reading of Chapter One. This step requires a brief lead-in to the novel itself, a sensitive reading aloud, and a few questions that invite students to see what Steinbeck accomplishes in his opening pages. A suggested procedure follows:

FIRST SESSION

The teacher reads aloud "The Parable of the Good Samaritan", Luke 10: 20-37, then poses a question.

Teacher: A parable is a story that's intended to teach a lesson. What lesson do you think is intended in "The Parable of the Good Samaritan"?

- Discussion -

Teacher: Listen to what John Steinbeck wrote about his short novel The Pearl: "If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it." We'll judge whether or not The Pearl can be called a parable after we've read it. Let's begin.

At this point, copies of the book are distributed and the teacher begins to read aloud, pausing now and then to ask questions which invite the students to consider such key elements as

- Kino's "music",
- the relationship of Kino and Juana,
- the conditions in which they live.

Assuming a lesson period of about 40-45 minutes, this introduction and initial reading could take the class up to the moment when the parents first notice the scorpion poised above Coyotito's crib. The students may continue reading at home if they wish, but at this point are not required to do so.

SECOND SESSION

The teacher continues reading Chapter One aloud, completing the reading in four stages. After each stage, he asks the students to explore the responses that Steinbeck is trying to draw from them as readers. Here are the stages and some possible questions for each:

1. Coyotito is stung by the scorpion.
   - What does the scorpion incident add to our knowledge of the way Juana and Kino divide authority in the family?
   - Kino doesn't say much, but he's a man with strong emotions. How does this incident bring out that quality?

2. The brush-house people go into town to the doctor's house.
   - Why do you suppose Steinbeck puts the church beggars into this part of his story?
   - The Spanish town differs from the Indian village. How?

3. The narrator describes the doctor.
   - How does the author want us to feel toward the doctor?
   - How do you know that?
   - What would you say is the doctor's attitude toward religion?

4. The doctor reacts to the plea for help.
   - The doctor's dialogue with his servant confirms our impression of him. What words in particular?
   - Think back through the whole chapter. What are all the indications provided by Steinbeck to make us aware that Kino is a deeply emotional man?

This early close reading is important because the opening chapter establishes the relationship between Kino and Juana and prepares us for the way it develops. Juana, obedient and passive at first, becomes the dominant partner at the novel's conclusion. And it gives us a foretaste of the protective passion that transforms Kino later on the mountainside into an efficient killer of the men who threaten his family.

The teacher could assign home reading and personally conduct further question-and-answer lessons in class, or he may prefer to delegate responsibility for leading discussions to groups of students. If he decides on the latter course, he will require the class to agree on a date by which everyone will have finished reading the novel, perhaps allowing some time in class for this silent reading to get underway. The next step is to inform the class how the rest of the novel - chapters 2 to 6 - is to be studied. On duplicated sheets the class receives a pattern of headings under which a study group comprising four students can work out an analysis of one of the remaining chapters, each student taking responsibility for a different heading.

HEADINGS UNDER WHICH A GROUP OF STUDENTS CAN ORGANIZE AN INTERPRETATIVE COMMENT ON A CHAPTER OF THE PEARL

1. A brief resumé of the action in the chapter.

2. An account of relations between Kino and Juana.

   How is their relationship made clear to us in this chapter?
   What changes in their relationship are taking place?
   What is the importance of the pearl in these changes?

3. An analysis of Steinbeck's description of nature.

   (Steinbeck wrote this novelette with a film script in his mind. The book was published in 1945, the movie was released in 1947. Look for parts of the chapter which invite filmic treatment.)

   The novel includes vivid descriptions of animals, plant life, seascapes, and landscapes. What connection can you see between such descriptions in this chapter and the parable element in the story?

4. A brief explanation of what gives the chapter its chief interest.

Since there are five chapters to be handed in this way, twenty students will be occupied in five groups with four people in each. Probably a period or two of in-class group discussion will be necessary, with the teacher moving from group to group giving help as needed. When preparations have been completed, each group presents an analysis and interpretation of its chapter to the rest of the class. In the likely event that the teacher has a class larger than twenty, topics such as those in the list below can be assigned to other members of the class, working in study groups of three members each. These topics should be allotted to the most able students since they present a more difficult challenge than the chapter-by-chapter analysis.

TOPICS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION OF THE PEARL

NAMES

1. **Attitudes Toward Religion and the Supernatural in The Pearl**

   Which beliefs seem Christian? Which seem pagan? Which characters seem sincere in their attitude toward the supernatural? Which characters seem insincere? Judging from the evidence in the novelette, what is Steinbeck's attitude toward religion and the supernatural?

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

2. **Animal Imagery in The Pearl**

   Many animals are referred to and described in detail. Frequently, human beings are likened to animals. Why does Steinbeck introduce so many animal images into his story?

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

3. **Irony in The Pearl**

   What do we mean by irony in fiction? In what passages does the tone of the narrator sound ironic? What situations in the novel are ironic? Where is the irony amusing? Where is the irony grim? How is irony related to the theme of the novel?

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

4. **The Element of Suspense in The Pearl**

   What are the incidents of greatest suspense? What accounts for the intensity of the suspense in the incidents that you have chosen?

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

5. **The Relationship of Juana and Kino**

   Although their mutual dependence is great, their relations with each other fluctuate. Trace the development in their relationship. Is there sufficient development to justify saying that an important change in this relationship has occurred by the end of the novel?

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

6. **Contrasts in The Pearl**

   There are contrasts between characters, between settings, between what a character hopes for and what he actually achieves. What contribution to the novel is made by these contrasts?

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

7. **Attitudes toward the Pearl of the World**

   What are the main attitudes toward it? What changes in these attitudes occur? How are these attitudes related to the theme of the novel?

   1. _____
   2. _____
   3. _____

The next step points the class to the other five novels, each student applying his newly enlarged critical awareness to the reading of one of them. During this part of the unit the teacher plays a crucial role as guide, but after providing an initial stimulus, works mostly from the background as helper-on-call.

STUDYING SEVERAL NOVELS EXTENSIVELY AFTER STUDYING THE PEARL INTENSIVELY

Copper Sunrise, Bryan Buchan
Julie of the Wolves, Jean Craighead George
Luke Baldwin's Vow, Morley Callaghan
Walkabout, James Marshall
Lord of the Flies, William Golding

The teacher introduces the new novels with brief "teasers" such as those in the annotations already provided for the novels above, or by reading an exciting early passage from a novel. Students are invited to choose on the basis of these introductory remarks. Each of the books will be read by five or six students who will later form a study group in order to discuss the novel they have read in common. It is important that the teacher influence choice to some extent so that the more able readers tackle more complex novels like Walkabout and Lord of the Flies, and the less able readers try Copper Sunrise or Julie of the Wolves.

One element that the five novels share with The Pearl, the core text, is that they all may be read as parables. However, this point need not be made at the outset by the teacher. Better that it should emerge in discussion among the students later--if necessary with a little subtle guidance from the teacher at that time. Preparations at this stage will include the steps itemized below:

(1) A deadline is set by which time the members of each group will have completed the reading of their respective novels. The two class sessions immediately following the introduction will be devoted to in-class silent reading of the novels so that everyone may get off to a good start.

(2) Study guides (such as the one that accompanies this material) are distributed and the teacher explains that these are to be used to provide a focus during the two in-class group discussion periods that will begin on the deadline day.

(3) Following the group discussion periods there will be five whole-class sessions in which each study group, acting as a panel, will "present" its particular novel to the rest of the class. Each panel member will comment on one aspect of the novel, using one of the categories outlined in the study guide. (Six categories are detailed in the guide attached to this material, one for each of the six panelists.)

(4) In addition to presenting his commentary orally to the class as a member of the panel for the day, each student will submit it as a revised, 500-word paper for grading by the teacher.

(5) A possible scheme for evaluating a student's participation in this group study of the novel follows:

for the spoken presentation and for handling questions from the class	15 marks
for the paper	20 marks
for contributing to discussion throughout the presentations by other panels	15 marks
Total	50 marks

A STUDY GUIDE ON THE NOVEL FOR SMALL GROUPS

A. INTRODUCTION

1. What main concern is suggested by the title of the novel?
2. What is the author trying to establish in the opening chapters?
3. What is the setting in time and place? Is it a vital factor to the story?
4. What initial situation of unrest or conflict is established in the opening chapters?
5. What central characters associated with this situation are introduced?

B. DESIGN IN THE NOVEL

6. Briefly summarize the main storyline.
7. Does the story go straight ahead in time or are there flashbacks? What purpose do they serve?
8. Is there more than one story being told? What purpose, if any, do these subplots serve?
9. What conflicts can you find?
10. What is the climax or major turning point of the novel?
11. What images, words, settings, ideas and scenes are repeated in the novel? What associations do they evoke?

C. THE CENTRAL CHARACTER AND SECONDARY CHARACTERS

12. What is the motivation of the central character?
13. What personality traits help or hinder the central character in the achievement of his purpose?

14. What other characters support or oppose the actions of the central character?

15. In which scenes is the main character depicted as making choices essential to his success or failure? Are they the result of conscious deliberation, or the consequence of certain deeply embedded character traits?

16. Were the characters true-to-life or stereotypes? Were they merely 'points of view' or did they come to life as personalities?

17. Were you able to identify with one particular character?

18. In what ways did any leading character in the book change?

D. THEMES

19. What are the major themes of the novel? Which one seems to be the most important?

20. What comments does the novel make on these subjects?

21. Is the comment communicated directly or indirectly? What techniques does the writer use?

22. Does the author say anything that you think is important about life or people?

23. What attitudes toward life is the writer expressing?

24. Is there a meaning here that 'touches' you personally?

25. Does any theme in the book carry a social significance?

E. THE ENDING

26. To what extent does the conclusion of the story agree with your idea of a 'right' or 'just' ending?

27. What change(s) have taken place in the main character(s) between the opening situation and the conclusion of the novel?

28. Is this change and the means by which it is brought about related to the 'message' of the novel? How?

29. Are any motifs used in the opening also used in the conclusion? If so, what are they?

30. Has the author left any loose ends? If so, what justification would the author have for this lack of resolution?

F. OVERVIEW

31. What special techniques (such as contrast, irony, and exaggeration) has the author used and what is achieved by the use of these techniques?

32. Are any elements in the novel unjustified or unnecessary? Justify your point of view. Do the characters and situations seem believable? Does the author depend upon coincidence or were events developed logically and inevitably? Mention any parts of the novel that stand out as particularly vivid or significant.

33. What merits does the book have? What are its weaknesses? Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why, or why not?

Only Copper Sunrise and Julie of the Wolves were written intentionally for an adolescent readership, but all six novels are accessible to most readers in that age group and all are worth thoughtful study, both for their formal literary qualities and for the compassionate reflection they stimulate on the proper place of man in this painful, mysteriously beautiful world.